

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members

I am Loretta Miller of Helena. I am appearing today in opposition to House Bill 534. I am basing my opposition on my experience as a motorcyclist.

As a motorcycle rider, my safety depends on my ability to constantly monitor my surroundings, in front, beside, and behind me. I have to take the information I hear and see to make decisions about how to ride safely. If I see or hear something that is a danger signal to me, I have only a split second to make a decision and respond. The information I receive from my surroundings is markedly decreased when I put on a helmet.

If you have ever worn a helmet, you know how difficult it is to hear a conversation without removing it. Now instead of trying to hear a conversation, think about listening to the sound of the traffic around you that feeds you clues as to what the traffic around you is doing. Also if you have ever worn a helmet, you know that your peripheral vision is nearly gone. Consider that there is a car slightly behind but very close to you, but you can't see it or hear it. What type of danger are you in on the road when you can't monitor those surroundings because you are wearing a helmet. As you can see from the article that I have attached to this testimony, wearing a helmet makes a rider legally deaf and blind. Please read this article I have attached. It explains the safety standards for helmets and the actual effects of the helmet on the head and neck in an accident. Although the whole body will be involved in an accident, the impact of the helmet is limited to the neck and head.

Most of the information we see about motorcycle accidents comes from the media. Those reports are centered on the fatalities. A point is made in the stories if the rider is not wearing a helmet, but it is not mentioned if the rider was wearing one.

There is no way to know how many accidents have been averted because a biker was aware of his surroundings and missed a close call. Nearly every rider in this room has been in a situation that required quick reflexes to avert an accident. Many times we had a little more time because we were monitoring our surroundings without interference from a helmet.

Just as a small aside, my uncle was killed in a single motorcycle accident. He was wearing a helmet. The official cause of death was a broken neck caused by the helmet. Would he have died had he not had the helmet on? Maybe or maybe not.

You have heard and will hear again and again today that this a freedom issue. We should be free to make our decision to wear a helmet or not. Montana people are proud of our freedoms. As bikers we are also proud of our freedom. So to us a helmet law is a double whammy. We elected you to protect our freedom. We think we are adults with enough sense to provide for our safety.